

# Brands on TikTok: Strategic first steps and successful execution

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## Abstract

*TikTok has fast become the world's most talked-about social network — in the news and popular culture, the relatively new player in the fray presents an opportunity to reach consumers in a new, relatable way and, most importantly, appeals to the holy grail of demographics. While any major brand with the right marketing budget can reserve one of TikTok's many (and growing) media products, implementing a solid organic channel strategy for TikTok is essential for smaller brands, individuals and agencies. This paper provides a practical guide to being successful on TikTok as well as clear initial guidance to consider whether the platform fits into your wider social strategy. It also provides advice on execution, brand examples and pragmatic starters to help you and your team feel educated on the platform.*

## Keywords

*TikTok, mobile, social media, video, apps, music, audio*

## THE STORY SO FAR

In September 2016, an app called A.me was launched with a focus on short music videos, created and posted by a target market of millennials.<sup>1</sup> The app was soon renamed Douyin, and in just under a year the user base multiplied. The app continued to proliferate, and TikTok, the international version of Douyin, became popular outside of China, reaching 2 billion downloads worldwide<sup>2</sup> in April 2020.

TikTok now boasts stars such as Will Smith (45 million followers), Jason Derulo (39 million followers) and Dwayne 'The Rock' Johnson (29 million followers) and

also creates its podium of celebrity influencers like Addison Rae, Dixie D'Amelio, Bella Poarch, Michael Le and, of course, the biggest to date (at the time of writing), Charli D'Amelio, with over 100 million followers.

Finding a meaningful, effective and manageable way for a brand to be present on TikTok can seem like a science — or maybe just too much work. It is likely, however, that there is some pressure to be present on TikTok. This paper is designed to do two basic things:

1. Support you in speaking from learned experience when educating yourself and colleagues on the world of TikTok.

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2. Providing first steps and best practice advice to get a TikTok brand strategy started on the platform.

## BUCKING THE TREND

Photography, the age of creativity on the internet, and identity have driven growth on social platforms over the last decade. As this growth has been happening, a parallel discussion about privacy and personal relationships has become a thread that we have all leaned into. Watching someone's day has become more of a curated look at their life than a real lens, and filters have become more of a metaphorical thing than just gel on a camera lens. Social networks adapted to this change, and brands on the platforms could carefully curate how their brands looked and felt behind the filter. Brands had an identity — and a lack of personality on the platform was often accepted, almost expected as the way brands operate.

Timeline-based internet social media (stories, the 'timeline') armed the everyday person (including influencers, foes or friends) with tools to collect, disseminate, post and analyse news and information alongside traditional news outlets and journalists. In many ways, social media was challenging how journalists reported, and as a finale to this closing of the loop in news journalism, between 2016 and 2020, Twitter became the primary megaphone for the world's most significant seat in office, the US presidency. TikTok became news itself as it was swallowed up into the fake news cycle, claiming a foreign power could use data from US users — the app was banned in some nations and nearly suffered the same fate in the USA.

Video has become the most influential media on the internet. Many platforms have seen their most incredible rise because of video or a video-based

addition to the platform, but until now, audio has been relatively overlooked — muted at first and always second to visual stimulation.

The most popular social networks became video-based inbound traffic sources for news websites, and then native news viewing through video became more popular on platforms such as Instagram and Facebook. Live editing, curation and having an angle on the news is essential, but TikTok, the young new challenger in the social sphere, is shaking things up, requiring accuracy and credibility in a world of spin. For example, where ephemeral story-based content had made such an impact on news journalism, TikTok is already making its mark on the world of music journalism. Traditional mainstream music journalism, 'largely uninterested in promoting discovery'<sup>3</sup>, is being turned on its head by upstart music blogs on the social network of the moment, TikTok. The emergence of music journalism on the platform was always expected.

Now that it is happening, we are beginning to see how it could change the way record labels, artists and consumers approach music discovery. Traditional blogging cannot compete with the viral nature of the TikTok algorithm. Music discovery for Gen Z is served primarily through Spotify playlists, but a platform designed around discovery can take flight here with music. TikTok accounts such as MostleyMusic, Loveinamovie and Hahakcoolgottagobye are run and operated by Gen Z individuals, now balancing incoming submissions from significant labels, conversations with artists, and serving their 300,000+ followers — all while trying to pass finals.<sup>3</sup>

This disruptive change to music news, combined with the need for credibility, is not limited to the world of journalism. Trustworthiness in an age defined by

privacy and identity is crucial, and where other platforms are carefully manicured brand power-gardens, TikTok has a sense of purity. Do not be cheated by the nature of TikTok, which may look and feel like very many video platforms brand marketers already advertise on but whose rules are significantly different.

### YOUR BRAND AND TIKTOK

Very broadly, the question of whether social media is a right fit for your brand is answered very simply: yes. What is more important to ask yourself is, who would have a relationship with your brand on social media? Even for a B2B brand, even something that has very little consumer interface such as manufacturing or semiconductors, employer branding, for example, is an excellent way to show the culture of your business and attract great candidates (see ‘Rules of Engagement’ and some guidance on authenticity in the following sections).

With TikTok, the strategic opportunity for brands becomes somewhat narrower, and while there is a suite of paid ad products on TikTok, the bigger question you need to answer is, what relationship a creator has with your product or service? Consider TikTok an opportunity to see how creative a community of makers can be with what you sell. In 2019 Tony Piloseno, a university student who worked part time at a Sherwin-Williams store, was fired by the business for using his work hours and company equipment to create colour-mixing videos on his TikTok channel.<sup>4</sup> A huge missed strategic opportunity. To avoid costly mistakes like this and consider whether TikTok is right for your brand, here is a quick test:

1. Would our product or service work on camera, either by a first-hand

demonstration or with an example? And does using our product or service on camera fit with TikTok’s guidelines for content?

2. Can our product or service be purchased online?
3. Is the audience for our product or service using TikTok (see ‘Your Fellow TikTok Users’, further on)

If the answer to these questions is yes, then TikTok likely has a place in your brand strategy. The rest of this paper is designed to provide you with hands-on execution knowledge to begin that strategy and work and to educate the rest of your team on how the app works for a brand.

### EUREKA! VIRALITY BY DESIGN

While it might seem like a ‘video’ platform at first glance, TikTok is very much a platform designed for addictiveness. It keeps the viewer inside the platform — it readdresses the role audio has to play when someone is using their phone, and it reframes the experience and why the user has arrived here. But how do we summarise some of the unique features of TikTok? When talking to your colleagues and executives about TikTok, here is what you need to focus on:

#### Just for you

Some of the most heavily guarded secrets in the brand world create the most fame surrounding the secrets themselves. John Pemberton shared the famous Coca-Cola recipe with only four people before he died in 1888.<sup>5</sup> Even the identity of the two employees in possession of the Coca-Cola secret is itself a secret.<sup>6</sup> These days that recipe is known to be more of a marketing strategy rather than a real trade secret, but

just as physical products have their secrets, the digital comparatives are indeed no different. While this brand marketing magic around recipes like Dr. Pepper, Coca-Cola, KFC and Irn-Bru have become infamous for their secrecy, the TikTok secret war-rants just as much fame — since it is as valuable and central to the product, it is essentially the product itself.

Netflix, a pioneer in digital consumption through algorithms, may well have already burst the bubble on any TikTok algorithm secrets years before, when, in 2013, they introduced a smart, but primarily under-the-radar, algorithm surrounding the ‘My List’ feature on the platform. Star ratings were removed and replaced with a thumbs up or thumbs down on content; however, behind the scenes, the removal of this rating was replaced with ‘My List’ — both a handy bookmark for shows you want to watch, but also an incredible identifier for Netflix of shows that you want to see more of or save to your library for quick reference later. ‘My List’ is essential to both the user and the platform.<sup>5,7</sup>

I cannot confirm or deny the contents of TikTok’s algorithm, but here are some of the crucial factors to consider that will ultimately feed the algorithm information:

- *Profile/Follow:* As a matter of user experience, the profile badge (with a + to follow) is placed prominently at the top of the list of engagement buttons. Consider this, however: If ‘For You’ is the page where a user lands, how crucial is a follow?
- *Like:* A double-tap and a hit on the heart on the right indicate that a user likes the content. This information, paired with the duration of a user’s watch (more importantly, if they finished the video) are all crucial data points. The rules for likes are not dissimilar to those for other apps, but consider this one unique asset: sound invokes a different response.
- *Comment:* As with all social content, comments are central here, and, owing to the nature of the TikTok content cycle, comments themselves can become the subject of another post. Review how you can create content that inspires comments first and foremost.
- *Share:* You must have seen a video elsewhere on the social web that has the TikTok logo burned into the video. TikTok is a capture, edit and sharing app, beautiful and central to the video-sharing web. Sharing from inside the app does prioritise sending it to a fellow friend on TikTok — although sweet, it is undermined by the apparent attraction to syndicating the video elsewhere, on another platform. How will your brand embody that feeling of TikTok while enabling content to be worth sharing? What makes people want to repost?
- *Sounds:* The centre of this platform, its raison d’être — audio. This button enables the user to trace the originating sound (including music snippet), where else on TikTok it has been used and, most importantly, to ‘use this sound’ in their creation. Does your brand have sounds or jingles that are unique and versatile?

These engagement buttons, paired with just the right amount of information on the video, poster and audio, is presented to the user as soon as they arrive on the app. One of the most prominent ad products, ‘top view’, provides brands with an opportunity to be the first native-style video a user sees when they arrive here (see ‘Paid Formats’, later). TikTok uses data from all these engagement buttons to work fast and serve you videos it believes you will want to watch next, curated for an ever shorter attention span, trigger-happy thumb and tiny-screen thrill-seeking attitude to reward the senses — all of this neatly wrapped up on one page where the user always lands

when they first arrive at the platform, conveniently and lovingly titled 'For You'.

This viral algorithm — one that traditional blogging struggles to compete with — is essential to the success of TikTok and to that of your brand marketing programme on the platform. This algorithm and page present an interesting change in focus for brand marketers, and later we will review how to rethink a content strategy to work with this process; see 'Rules of Engagement'.

### Quick guide: Paid formats

In this piece, our focus is very much on organic TikTok brand channels, but for the benefit of brand marketers and primarily for educating their co-workers, here is a brief guide on the primary ad products on the platform:

#### Standard

- *Top View*: Mimicking the user interface (UI) of TikTok, this unit provides brands with the opportunity to be the first native content piece a user sees on the platform, for a duration of up to a minute.
- *In-feed ads*: Akin to the top view, these 15-second units look and feel like a regular TikTok video; however, they include the necessary '#ad' identification and a deep link to an external page or experience.
- *Brand Takeover*: A little more jarring than the native top view, brands can take over the first screen a user sees with a video or image full screen.

#### Non-standard

- *Branded hashtag challenge*: This is non-standard; however, the original place to

garner engagement on TikTok is a hashtag challenge, and here brands can own the hashtag and aggregate activity on a branded hashtag page, an idea that Twitter tried but failed to successfully capitalise on years ago.

- *Branded effects*: This is an innovative corner of TikTok. The world of AR, 2D and 3D, real-world environments can be sponsored by brands in creative ways.

### Audio first

Other mobile-first social networks (ie Instagram) have enveloped the social experience around videos and photos; TikTok is built entirely for virality and uses the most undermined sense to do that: audio. As a brand on TikTok, you will want to consider what role audio *already* has to play with existing brand marketing — do you have a jingle or a recognisable voice? What type of audio or snippet would be synonymous with the tone of your brand? Give this some thought before you continue.

As the first (and to date, only) 'sound on' platform, TikTok has upended a social media marketer's traditional ability to churn out threads and themes of content quickly — often described as 'streams'. Audio is a medium that requires listening, focus and intent behind the marketing. Later we will look at how this also means it is so much easier for even the least discerning TikTok follower to spot extemporaneous brand marketing content a mile off (see 'Rules of Engagement').

### YOUR FELLOW TIKTOK USERS

As you drop your brand into the world of TikTok, here is a guide on whom you are joining.

## Demographics

The USA, with more than 26.5 million users<sup>8</sup> of the estimated 1 billion monthly active user base,<sup>9</sup> is made up of an engaged yet fugacious group of 18–24-year-olds and a significant bystander group of 25–34-year-olds, altogether representing over 50 per cent of its massive (US) user base. For brand marketers, however, a broader look at the TikTok user base presents one of the unique conundrums in the brand marketing world; a quarter of (US) users on the platform are aged 45–64 — an app that has grown so fast indeed proves to brand marketers that fads are not child's play.<sup>10</sup>

As brand marketers, it is also important to remind ourselves that many apps and platforms, TikTok included, have a minimum age limit of 13, but no structure around the integrity of submitting one's age when signing up.

## User styles

Much like all the other social networks, TikTok serves users that come to the platform for something a little different. TikTok has become much more diverse and intersectional between different visits, meaning that one person could potentially come to the platform for different reasons on different visits.

For a brand, this means that embodying the spirit of creation and consumption is a crucial part of the TikTok experience — having an authentic presence (see 'Rules of Engagement') on TikTok demands personality, and the perfect account may well incorporate a blend of all three of these types — styles of the user.

It is also worth noting that this is an extreme simplification of the TikTok user base, representing a critical tipping point of information for brand marketers to

succeed on the platform. Here we cover the 90:9:1 of TikTok users, paddlers, swimmers and divers, respectively.

While you review these and consider how to interpret this information for your brand, it is important to be playful and soft with your thinking — TikTok frequently exhibits unique characteristics, and different user styles are symbolic of the user demands of TikTok, not their level of expertise. For example, do not be surprised if you see a 'paddler' posting a video. Paddling the surface does not demonstrate a deficiency of knowledge about the platform, but, as with the other user styles, is more of an indicator of the users' relationship with TikTok.

## Paddlers

Remember, TikTok is not defined by a millennial age group; both baby boomers, Gen X and Gen Z, appreciate different content threads here, and many first-time users of the platform fall into this category. They are largely those who do not want to delve beneath the surface but enjoy scrolling through a plethora of singing-goat videos. TikTok could replace a great deal of time spent elsewhere; on average, a paddler might spend twice as long as they do on any other social network in TikTok.<sup>11</sup> When you consider what 'double' can represent, it is immediately apparent why Hollywood studios see such a threat from TikTok, but also such an opportunity.

In the winter of 2019, five of the major movie studios came to me asking how best to understand TikTok for their brand. 'I do not get it, why do my kids love it?' is all too often something that a hard-pressed movie studio executive might ask. For so many other social networks, there are some effortless ways to quickly 'get it' (eg Pinterest, Twitter, Snapchat), but for TikTok my advice is 'use it'. Read the



comments, spend a few minutes on it through the day, jump in every few hours or days, and see how it changes, depending on you and your viewing habits.

Do your best not to ignore this broad slice of the user base since they primarily curate the umbrella algorithm. In this sense, TikTok is much like stand-up comedy: you need an audience to test your materials, and these paddlers represent that arable testing ground. For a little more on what I mean by ‘testing’, see ‘Rules of Engagement’.

### Swimmers

Although quiet, they make up the heart of the network. Comments are crafted with care and humour, the occasional duet video and a broad, but often deep, understanding of the most popular trends and creators. We can expect this category of users to spend significantly more time browsing the platform than any other type, merely because they have the most goal-oriented, focused method of browsing the app. A part of their lives, it is symbiotic with their every activity, and TikTok should be eternally grateful for their patronage.

In the brand marketing world, this group’s trends will determine the more long-term user experience changes. For brands, this means that while this group does not bring our attention to some niche trends, they can be a clear indicator of what is to come on the platform, by way of mass user experience. Swimmers — akin to a Reddit user or Wikipedia moderator — are crucial advisors or brand allies to enlist when executing on TikTok. When crafting your brand strategy, consider how this multitude of thumb-tapping troopers will respond to catalyse viewing and commenting by others.

This group spends much more time on the app, typically with deeper use of

functions and more dedicated content generated around trends, and thus this group could more commonly define product updates to TikTok such as its integration into Samsung smart TVs and its branded effects. Although essential roadmap items, they are often decided by how the swimmers are using them and what makes their mind tick. Yes, you might be onto something by suggesting that I have a soft spot for this slice of the platform — ‘swimmers’ are that group that keeps the life of TikTok humble and relational.

### Divers

Divers choose to create first and foremost. In any textbook, you may identify their characteristics as similar to those of a creator — the cardinal ‘c’ of Google’s Generation C. TikTok has accelerated the focus on creation by putting some sophisticated but straightforward creator tools in the front and centre of its platform. Hence, being a ‘creator’ just by traditional methods is a thing of the past on TikTok. Anyone can create things, but it takes a master of communities and curation to truly make it — step in, divers.

Divers create unique and relevant content for communities or niche slithers of a larger group. This is how a TikTok user can very often predict something about you that makes you feel ‘seen’. In this sense, our divers feel a responsibility to consider what is on this community’s mind at that moment in time. This is a few steps past social media management 101 — where content, themes and trends are a little more niche and speak directly to specific communities, conversations and trends.

Only in the last decade, when content has been abundant, have brand marketers learned to appreciate the power of niche relevancy. When researching

TikTok for a famous American fast-food chain, we needed to provide a cross section on food, culture and heritage — we had architected a credulously specific end point here; honestly stabbing in the dark with expectations, but one search of an obscure hashtag we saw in a comment and we found ourselves off-piste into the innards of TikTok. A member of my team exclaimed, ‘I guess we found the dark side of the TikTok moon!’ Although not what we hypothesised, or expected, it was rich.

Specific, uniquely relatable niches exist in large, hidden volumes on TikTok, and divers engineer them. This kind of thinking is the holy grail of modern mass media that only giants like Netflix had mastered thus far; ‘Show me a niche only I and a handful of other people are interested in, and keep me there’.

## RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

Social networking is very often compared to a good party; you have the right people, the right environment, the right conversation and bang! You have a social network. Those rules still apply here, and you will see where this analogy still stands firm, but TikTok shows us that how — even in its relative infancy, it bucks the trend; unlike other social networks, it is focused on creating an addictive and inseparable environment for your mind. Other social networks have been focused primarily on good places to share content. If you are reading this, I expect your brand to consider how TikTok can play a role in selling your product or service. Knowing how to carry your brand on TikTok is as much about knowing your brand as about knowing the way the platform operates. This can be distilled into two essential rules if you abide by which will ensure your brand is accepted into the community. Connect authentically, and create adaptively.

### 1. *Connect authentically*

No doubt brands treat official social media channels in different ways — some see it as a function of a specific department (eg PR), while some see it as a multifaceted function of all departments. Most have tweaked and laboured over the ‘tone of voice’ of their social, where others are at the mercy of their legal department, including disclaimers, terms, conditions and policies in tweets. As brand marketers, we have become finely tuned to diplomacy between these departments, especially in communicating the role that social media can play for each of them.

More recently, and accelerated in the last four to six years, tireless social media managers have evidenced how having a real person’s voice — not necessarily a corporation — can work for even the old-fashioned of organisations. The arrival of TikTok has accelerated that change in tone, so being present on the platform as a brand means authentic connections are central.

‘Connect authentically’ means that instead of creating a polished video of your executives, reading a script on screen, find a way to showcase stakeholders in the most relatable way. Find moments of your business unique to it with its customers/clients and employees, and remember that the platform is viewed on the phone, so it should be shot on the phone. Let the voice on the platform feel personal — if you can, have your TikTok creative directed by one individual with a clearly defined vision and voice.

As marketers, we caution you that it is all too easy for a brand to sound tone-deaf, miss the mark and try to sound ‘woke’ when we might not be that. Authenticity should be taken seriously on TikTok. Many in your team



likely know the platform, many browse it, but which member of your team is a ‘diver’ that knows the depths of the TikTok content world and how the UI of the creative element of the app works?

Content that you might see perform well when considering ‘connect authentically’ includes the following:

- Identity stories
- Slice of life
- Recycled sound
- Duets
- Challenges

## 2. Create adaptively

Note that earlier we briefly mentioned content ‘streams’ — methods by which marketers churn out threads and themes of content quickly. To date, this threaded ‘streams’ method of content production has worked and has kept followers on platforms like Instagram, Facebook and Twitter familiar with the content they have arrived for. For the follower of a page, familiarity is a comfortable, easy-to-engage-with media, but what if we ignore those followers for a moment?

As noted before, the main page in TikTok, ‘For You’, is based on a curation algorithm, and not entirely pages that you follow (though you may see accounts you follow occasionally in the ‘For You’ page); thus, branded, organic content on TikTok can be considered both a careful science and a test and learn process.

*The science:* A TikTok user creates content about themselves, their lives, ‘do it yourself’ (DIY), food and travel, for example.

*Test and learn:* Content trends on TikTok will typically have a healthier half-life than other social networks. The discovery method means that a

content piece can resurface to the top of the pile just as fast as it fell, and that motion keeps trends alive longer.

It is not unheard of to post a video to TikTok, watch how it does (good or bad) and then delete it if it is not performing. Experimentation on TikTok is essential to the content creation process, and for real success on the platform, your brand must consider how it will engineer that experimentation. If you work for a major brand that could struggle with the somewhat organic content creation method of test and learn here, the following would serve as crucial pointers:

- (a) *Formats, not streams:* As we have discussed, trends, niches and streams can be slippery areas for preparing content. So to keep things simple, look out for the ‘formats’ and ways in which your ‘swimmers’ are using content on the platform. Are character-selects still in vogue? Do duets include comments, or are glow-ups still the way to denote change? Make a list of formats you see performing well and consider them relevant for at least another 3–6 weeks.
- (b) *Experimentation attitude:* Social media managers are typically extremely creative, experimental people — they try and see and test and learn and honestly sometimes fail. That is part of the process, and for so many other social networks, other business divisions are protected from this process. With TikTok, subscribing to that attitude is essential to contributing at any level. As brand marketers, we must do as much work in the way we communicate and discuss success and failure on TikTok as we do creating the content itself. Consider how you position TikTok

to your brand — is it part of PR or part of R&D?

Do not be afraid to take a break from TikTok after you have started your account. Because TikTok prioritises ‘for you’ over ‘following’, you will notice there really is not a follower drop-off when you have not posted something for a while. Followers are less likely to notice when you leave and arrive back again, and while this can have some downsides, it generally helps with a lack of cadence when you are testing and learning.

Create Adaptively is to embody the spirit of experimentation and know the beast you are working with. On laying out a TikTok campaign plan for a client, one of our producers drew up the schedule. From managing other social channels for this brand, we had weekly editorial calendars and reviews, then monthly planning and reporting — superior, neat methods to manage a successful social presence. TikTok demanded a rethink of this method; after all, how can you be adaptable, learn and grow if you only have a chance to review how you are doing each month?

Instead, consider more organic ways to review things; smart ongoing content review documentation, suggestions from everyone on your sales team — adaptability on TikTok should not cost you anything more to master, but you will need to reconfigure some workflows.

Some content you might also see when considering ‘create adaptively’ includes:

- DIY videos
- Food
- Travel

## QUICK REFERENCE: CASE STUDIES

Inspiration is everywhere on TikTok, so I would encourage you to spend some time writing down trend formats and popular brand posts you see as your thumb leads you through. If you are short of time and need a few influential brands to start with, however, here is how just three brands are using the platform in different ways.

### Washington Post

Dave Jorgenson, now a master of the TikTok universe, on his TikTok channel, embodies qualities that make a successful branded TikTok account. The account, driven largely by Dave’s personality, is shot primarily inside the *Washington Post* offices, which switched to Jorgenson’s apartment during the pandemic. Its profile on TikTok comprises just four simple words — ‘We are a newspaper’ — and relatable, sometimes abstract, but always light-hearted content is expertly written and shot to create one of the most popular brand accounts on TikTok.

### Fortnite

Pairing together incredible characters of the game with iconic TikTok studio and dances, this account treads carefully between blatant outward promotion and self-aware ruinous silliness. This account for the prolific game sensation only has a few visible videos — one might suspect some of the less successful posts have been deleted. Do not be fooled by the polished look of the videos here, however, as that is just a symptom of the clean design aesthetic of Fortnite. This account has mastered giving the game life on a social network and making it feel like more than just a game.

## Fenty Beauty

Fenty Beauty is already an incredible name in the beauty world — living at the crossroads of intersectionality and skin tones for which traditional make-up just does not do the job. Self-expression and identity are fundamental for Fenty's brand, and so TikTok has an obvious fit for it. Where Fenty excels on TikTok is in its use of formats, primarily saturated by how-to guides using their products, paired with influential faces and tips for all the things you thought were unfixable about your everyday look. This content is designed to be both informational and paired with any of the TikTok common effects — for example, duet a Fenty video with yourself trying the tip in the video, or just scroll through and watch, share with friends or reshare outside of TikTok.

## GETTING STARTED: QUICK GUIDE

Be cautious about creating too much structure around your TikTok account — this can result in woodiness and a lack of authenticity, which is most crucial. This means that if your brand has not succeeded in social before, do not worry — TikTok can often garner a better result. If your brand has been successful elsewhere, be careful not to treat TikTok like other social networks. Build a workflow that suits adaptability over a rigid structure. Here is where to start from square zero:

1. *Personalise*: Search for the 'personal' moments of your brand — if your brand is quite corporate, perhaps look for this in the people, its customers and employees, or potentially the personal moments of its product or service. Avoid heavy branding, over-curated

messages/straplines and anything defined by the consortium — TikTok is about people, and your brand must act as such.

2. *Pause! Discover and engage*: After you have made your account, before you create your first piece of content, take some time to look around and engage with some content. Find employees, customers and other stakeholders already on the platform and appreciate their world on TikTok before you even start planning any content. As you enter this discovery page, consider how you can authentically contribute to this already-fast-moving train.
3. *Find Formats*: As we have previously noted, streams are not useful on TikTok, and regular 'trends' will reveal themselves; that will become second nature to you and your team in no time. Instead, consider noting down different formats that you see, and any effects or sounds that you hear more than twice will most likely be tied to that format.

Moreover, once you have done this, what about making the first piece of content? Furthermore, what kind of existing resources in your business could you use? Here is the 411 on the recipe for TikTok content:

## The right recipe

Be in the mindset of creation, testing and learning — and if your account goes dark for a short period while you do some planning, do not fret. Over time your goal is to build clout in communities, develop content that feels on-tone and of the moment.

- *Brands and music licensing*: No doubt the most significant initial hurdle for any brand to navigate on TikTok is music licensing, since brands on TikTok are under much more scrutiny than individuals. Post an audio snippet that is not yours on TikTok and face the legal team's wrath from the licence holder. There are three routes to navigate through this legal challenge:
  - (a) *Royalty-free music*: It can take a hot minute to find the right tracks for your creations, but royalty-free music takes the headache out of licensing.
  - (b) *Original sounds*: Obviously, the rarest (and potentially most expensive) opportunity here, but not one to be overlooked; does (or could) your brand own the marketing licence to any sounds or songs? Could your brand create or commission something?
  - (c) *Brand library*: Opening in Spring 2020, the brand music library offered by TikTok provides partner brands with an opportunity to use licensed music on their content. This library is a growing resource, updating quarterly. Since this pertains to brand relationships with the social network, I would recommend contacting a local rep for the platform.
- *Format Trends*: Creating content in styles of existing formats is the quick and easy way to contribute to an existing community, but do not be afraid to get creative and make a new format that you think is relatable.
- *Test, learn and reconfigure*: This can never be overemphasised when it comes to TikTok. Consider your account a fertile testing ground, learning to change by

the week and reconfiguring to be a part of your experience.

## CONCLUSION

The most popular brands on TikTok are posting the most unpredictable, entertaining and playful content. These broad themes, strategic activities and tactics will provide a foundation, but remember that TikTok can be an unpredictable platform with a massive opportunity.

Brand marketers have come to integrate many social networks into their brand marketing, PR, culture/recruitment and sales process in sophisticated ways. TikTok bucks a trend that can catch professionals off guard if they treat the platform like others (eg Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat) — thus, an open-minded, creative and experimental attitude to the platform can result in some of the most awesome content on the internet.

Albeit with some differences, TikTok displays some of the critical trimmings of other popular social networks, so find a way to combine your existing methods with this creative attitude.

Use the simple rules of 'connect authentically and create adaptively' to grow an account with impressive peaks. The platform's opportunity is excellent, and even the smallest brand can have substantial viral moments on the platform, but only if you are convincing, credible and authentic.

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